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High Administration Officials Have Links to Energy Industry

By DON VAN NATTA Jr. and NEELA BANERJEE

WASHINGTON, April 20 — Crucial White House positions and the upper ranks of several agencies, including the Interior Department and the Environmental Protection Agency, are held by appointees who, for years, worked in the energy industry, lobbied for it or defended its interests in the nation's courts.

The better known are the most visible: Secretary of Commerce Donald L. Evans, for example, who for 25 years worked for Tom Brown Inc., a Denver oil and gas company, and Andrew H. Card Jr., the White House chief of staff, who as president of the American Automobile Manufacturers Association lobbied against improving fuel efficiency and emission standards. Interior Secretary Gale A. Norton received \$285,630 from the energy and natural resources industries when she ran for the Senate in Colorado in 1996.

Energy industry alumni and supporters also hold less visible jobs in the administration and agencies that allow them to make far-reaching policy and regulatory changes.

Philip Cooney is the chief of staff for the Council on Environmental Quality, a White House advisory group that develops policies on environmental and economic issues. The council has played a crucial role in forming a White House policy that played down the effect of carbon dioxide emissions on global warming. Earlier, Mr. Cooney was a lawyer for the American Petroleum Institute, the main lobbying arm of the oil industry, and was a prominent critic of global warming theories.

James E. Cason holds a new high-level position in the Interior Department, associate deputy secretary. He was an assistant interior secretary under James A. Watt in the Reagan era and, critics say, tried to stop limits on drilling for oil and gas in national forests. The Interior Department denied that, underscoring instead Mr. Cason's recent tenure at a company that specializes in manufacturing energy-saving insulation.

As deputy secretary of the interior, the second in command at the department, J. Steven Griles oversees more than 500 million acres of federally protected land. Mr. Griles was the assistant secretary at the department from 1984 to 1989. He left the government to work for the mining industry, most recently with National Environmental Strategies, a Washington firm that represents the National Mining Association and utilities that use a lot of coal.

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In March 2001, the spokesman for the National Mining Association at the time, John Grasser, called Mr. Griles "an ally to the industry."

Mark Pfeifle, an Interior Department spokesman, noted that Mr. Griles worked with Democrats in the 1980's to close loopholes that allowed the coal industry to pollute heavily. He also said Mr. Griles's firm represented Caithness Energy, which specializes in renewable energy.

The number of people in the Interior Department who once worked in the energy industry is only a small slice of a much larger picture, said Mr. Pfeifle, who added that other officials had experience on the state level working "with local citizens to find compromise and consensus."

He added, "The real hands on deck are ready to implement what the secretary calls the four C's: communication, cooperation, consultation — all in the service of conservation."

John. D. Graham is the administrator of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs at the Office of Management and Budget, a powerful department that advises the president on regulatory change, particularly on environmental and public health issues. Mr. Graham is the founding director of the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis, a nonprofit organization financed by some of the country's largest energy and chemical companies, including ExxonMobil and Dow Chemical. The center's benefactors include the nation's biggest producers of dioxins, a substance widely thought to be carcinogenic, environmental groups said.

Senior White House officials argued that the backgrounds of some of the top staff members matter much less than the policies they develop.

"Look at the agenda, and look at the result of the policy," said Scott McClellan, deputy White House press secretary. "Any independent look at the president's agenda underscores his commitment to achieving results for the American people."

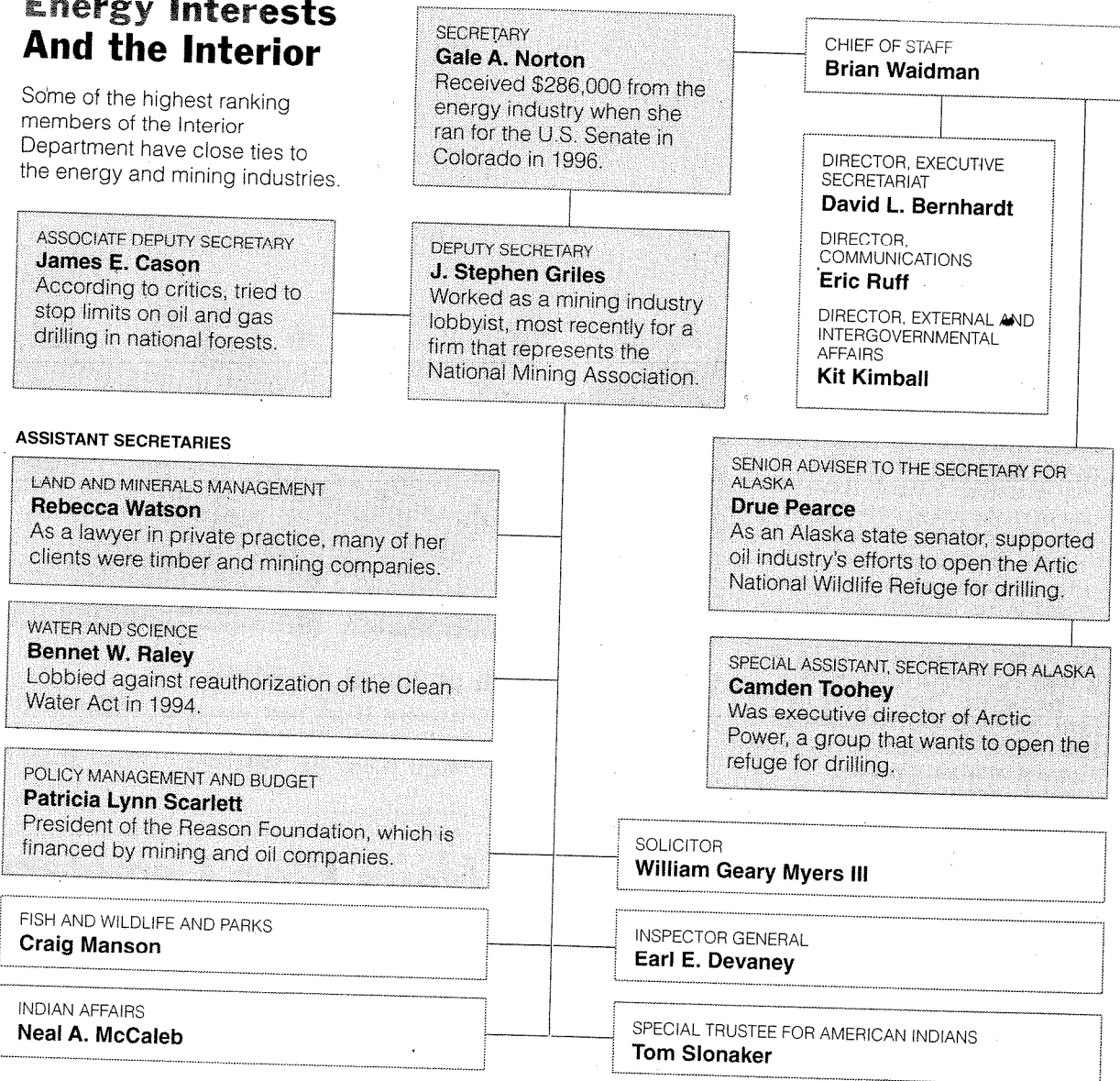
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Energy Interests And the Interior

Some of the highest ranking members of the Interior Department have close ties to the energy and mining industries.



Source: Department of the Interior; Earthjustice; Natural Resources Defense Council